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COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OF THEMATIC ISSUES RELATING TO THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Written statement submitted by the Association for World Education, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[15 July 1997]

1. The Association for World Education wishes to raise a recent issue of censorship that relates to the fundamental right of freedom of opinion and expression for all United Nations Special Rapporteurs.

2. In its resolution 1993/20, the Commission on Human Rights nominated Mr. Maurice Glélé-Ahanhanzo as Special Rapporteur, later mandating him "to examine incidents of contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, any form of discrimination, inter alia, against Blacks, Arabs and Muslims, xenophobia, negrophobia, anti-Semitism and related intolerance, as well as governmental measures to overcome them, and to report on these matters on a yearly basis to the Commission". His last report was submitted to the Commission's fifty-third session (E/CN.4/1997/71).

3. In this report, there is a section on anti-Semitism that contains a sub-heading (E.3, chap. II) entitled "Islamist and Arab anti-Semitism", which concludes with a quotation: "The use of Christian and secular European anti-Semitism motifs in Muslim publications is on the rise, yet at the same time Muslim extremists are turning increasingly to their own religious sources, first and foremost the Qur'an, as a primary anti-Jewish source." The original Arabic sources to which the quoted extracts refer are not included in the report.

4. No question was raised on this wording when the Special Rapporteur presented his report to the Commission. But on the last day of the session, at the time of the explanation of votes on the resolution accepting his report and supporting his mandate - and after he had returned home - the Indonesian representative, speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) affirmed that:

> "This amounts to the defamation of our religion 'Islam' and blasphemy against its Holy Book 'Qur'an'. We are infuriated that such a statement has been included in the report of the Special Rapporteur. The Commission on Human Rights cannot become a silent spectator to this defamation against one of the great religions of the world. We, therefore, call on the Commission to express censure for this defamatory statement against Islam and the Holy Qur'an and ask you, Mr. Chairman, to express this censure on behalf of the Commission." (verbatim; see also E/CN.4/1997/SR.68).

5. At the final evening meeting (SR.70), the Chairman read out an agreed draft decision, which was then adopted by consensus, becoming decision 1997/125. In it, the Commission:

(a) Decided, without a vote, to express its indignation and protest at the content of such an offensive reference to Islam and the Holy Qur'an;

(b) Affirmed that this offensive reference should have been excluded from the report;

(c) Requested the Chairman to ask the Special Rapporteur to take corrective action in response to the present decision.

6. For an account of this event and the dangers of such a precedent, see René Wadlow's "Shooting the Messenger", in Human Rights Tribune (Ottawa, vol. 4, No. 2-3, June 1997, pp. 10-11).

7. The Association for World Education believes that statements in thematic reports require bibliographic references in order to meet high standards of evidence, so that the exactitude of the facts put forward by the Special Rapporteur may be examined. The inclusion of such references to support a sound analysis will ensure a constructive discussion aimed at remedial action. In the spirit of this empirical approach, the Association wishes to provide examples of the accuracy of the above-mentioned quotation that was used as an excuse to justify the introduction of a "blasphemy" accusation and a request to censure a report at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. We shall here examine the three trends of anti-Semitism that appear in the controversial sentence: Christian, secular European and "Islamist and Arab anti-Semitism".

8. On the origins of Christian anti-Semitism, we have chosen a quotation from Emeritus Professor William Nicholls' major work Christian Anti-Semitism: A History of Hate (1993):

> "(...) because the Jews rejected and killed Christ, they in turn have been rejected as God's chosen people. The Jews have broken their ancient covenant with God, and he has made a new covenant, sealed in the blood of Christ, gathering to himself a new people, drawn from the Gentiles. This new people has now superseded the old Israel ... The Jews have lost their Temple and been exiled from their land. Until the return of Christ, they will remain homeless wanderers upon the earth. What theologians are beginning to call the theology of supersession joins hands with the myth of the deicide, Christ-killing people to make the Jews a permanent target for Christian hostility and contempt." (p. xix)

9. From the early twentieth century, there has been a strong and active school of Christian scholarship whose aim has been to analyse the historic, social and political context in which Christianity developed. There have been patient efforts to understand all the positions in these first century debates where theology, politics, sociology and the quest for identity were all mixed together. Such scholarship is essential for the study of all religious traditions so that religious texts, attitudes, laws and institutions are seen against their historical background. In the last two decades, this scholarship has become irrefutable, but "it will take time to be more widely absorbed" (p. 437). One should recall, in this context, the historic Nostra aetatae statement of the Ecumenical Council of Vatican II in 1965.

10. There are two major themes in Christian anti-Jewish thought which are used in Islamist publications. The first theme is the current irrelevance of the Jews in God's plan of salvation for humanity - the early alliance of God with the Jews has been superseded. The second theme is of a collective Last Judgement - on a whole people, as well as upon each individual. These themes were reiterated in a recent article by an Islamist writer, Dr. Mustafa Mahmoud, who uses the Qur'an to attack Jews, predicting the

destruction of Israel ("The Israeli haughtiness and how it will end" in Al-Ahram International [Arabic], Cairo, 17 May 1997).

11. There are many European secular strands of anti-Jewish thought being widely spread by certain Islamist publications, notably holocaust denial themes. However, the most widely used theme is a "conspiracy theory of history". (See the written statement of the Association for World Education submitted to the Commission entitled, "Constitution of the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas: 18 August 1988" (E/CN.4/1997/NGO/85).

12. This dangerous racist myth consists in the belief that a Jewish-led conspiracy seeks to control the world, a plot which is seen at work in every revolution, in every war since time immemorial and in all international organizations, including the United Nations. The most widespread of these conspiracy theories of history is contained in a forged document called The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. This forgery was fabricated in Paris at the turn of this century for the use of the Czar's secret police, the Okhrana. It inspired Hitler's radical anti-Semitism. The long history of The Protocols has been documented in full by the French sociologist Pierre-André Taguieff in his Les Protocoles des Sages de Sion: Faux et Usages d'un faux (1992).

13. The Protocols are still widely disseminated, having been reprinted in the last decades in at least 10 European countries. However, it is in the Arab-Islamic world that it remains a best-seller of hate and can be found in the main centres of the Middle East and the Maghreb. A recent Arabic edition of The Protocols, published in Beirut (Dar an-Nafais, 1990) and widely distributed includes a preface with a rare example of religious and racial hatred against the Jews that concludes with the prophesy of Israel's destruction: "This destruction is what we believe and teach to our children, striving toward its realization and asking for success from Allah, the Exalted One."

14. On the question whether Islamists actually use "religious sources, first and foremost the Qur'an, as a primary anti-Jewish source", a full documentation on such recurring themes may be found in Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel by D.F. Green (3rd ed., 1976), containing extracts from papers by several theologians at The Fourth Conference of the Academy of Islamic Research of September 1968 (Government Printing Offices, Cairo, 1970). Green comments: "The ideas expounded in this volume could lead to the urge to liquidate Israel (politicide) and the Jews (genocide)."

15. Numerous recent examples of this trend are commonplace and have been documented. See Rivka Yadlin, An Arrogant Oppressive Spirit: Anti-Zionism as Anti-Judaism in Egypt (1989), Raphael Israeli, Muslim Fundamentalism in Israel (1993), Daniel Pipes, The Hidden Hand: Middle East Fears of Conspiracy (1996), Martin Kramer, Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East (1996); and in the annual reports on anti-Semitism worldwide of the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League/World Jewish Congress. The details found in these works, as well as on cassettes and Internet, are facts that cannot be denied or dismissed as blasphemous when quoted.

16. Our conclusion will be that of the former Rector of the University of Oslo, Professor Inge Lønning, in his January 1995 Report on Anti-Semitism in Sweden (regarding the "Rami Affair"):

> "The general lesson to be learnt (...) should be that the challenge of manifest anti-Semitism should be faced by all citizens, but first and foremost by those in charge of central institutions in society, like church and universities. Representatives of the academic and the religious community should, in their double capacity of citizens and professionals, have a special awareness and a special obligation to meet the challenge in an adequate manner."

17. The struggle to combat racism in all its forms, including anti-Semitism, should not be blocked at the United Nations by accusations of "blasphemy" and appeals for censorship.